

## While the Play Was On

By Virginia Lella Wentz

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They came in rather late—the first act was well under way. The girl in her soft evening gown swept quietly down the aisle and took the seat indicated by the usher with serene noiselessness. The man with waxed mustaches and flashy diamond studs followed ostentatiously. He sat down, much to the annoyance of the party directly behind, after unduly pompous delay. Ostentation and pomposity were in Mr. Smart's line.

Mechanically the girl drew out her opera glasses from their bag, but she did not use them. Instead, with a little sign of content, she leaned back against her wrap, a gorgeous thing, ermine lined, belonging to her aunt, which she had been coaxed into wearing. The lights of the house were low, and as she leaned for a second, a billowy mass of chiffon and lace against the ermine, her heavily lashed eyelids half closed, and she smiled faintly.

Ah, it was so good to be faultlessly dressed from the top of her head to the tip of her shoe all at once—just once sure of herself all around! Not as it had always been with her down in dear old Kentucky—a gown achieved just as her hat was going out of fashion, a new wrap when her evening dresses were beginning to look a bit worn, boots a little shabby just as she was able to get fresh gloves and veil. Her eye fell on the billowy blouse of her bodice. How all her life she had loved lace—real, cobwebby lace! And ermine to nestle against—the lordly "feel of the thing!"

Well, now she was in the way to have it all. This month's visit with her aunt in New York had been fecund in results. Dances and dinners, suppers, theater parties, had filled the hurrying days and nights, but still, with her aunt's worldly insistence, she had found time to engage herself to the man beside her. "Capital, my dear!" her aunt had said when she heard the news, kissing her lightly on the cheek. "You see, Alberta, I knew what I was doing when I sent for you to come up from that poverty stricken Kentucky, and you had only to come to conquer. Of course Mr. Smart isn't exactly a paragon of beauty, and he's a bit 'new,' but think of his cool little million, his yacht, his horses, his splendid motor and all that sort of thing. Oh, I'll be proud of you yet, my poor little southern niece!"

"Beastly stupid play!" broke in upon Alberta's reverie. Mr. Smart spoke in a voice a trifle louder than conventional good form allows.

The girl lifted her eyebrows slightly and then nodded her head in indifferent acquiescence. As a matter of fact, she hadn't noticed a single bit of "business" on the boards nor heard a single line. Now, however, she raised her glasses. It gave her right hand some occupation. It had been lying perilously close to his, she observed.

During the second act the man fidgeted more than ever. "Come," he said finally; "don't let's waste any more time on such twiddle twaddle. It's weak tommyrot. We'll run up and order our supper instead."

But a girl with an ermine cloak thrown over the back of her chair was leaning forward, her elbows resting on her knees, her chin in the cup of her two hands. Her eyes were strangely watery as she watched the players on the stage.

"No," she whispered oddly without turning to Smart; "I like it. Let's stay."

"Was a simple enough little scene that she watched; a homely enough setting, too—a lane hedged with wild roses and honeysuckles, at one end of which stood a white cottage, sunny in the light of early morning. Just outside, by the hollyhock bushes, was a man fair and strong, looking like a young god in his splendid strength. He was catching up a child playfully and holding it high in the air, as is the way with proud fathers. Then out of the cottage, rosy, smiling, came a girl's figure, with her sleeves rolled up, and an apron on, to say goodby to her lord before he went to his day's labor. The sire kissed his child and set him down, patting the curly head. Then he drew the woman to him. "Goodby, and God bless you, dear, till I come home to-night," he said in a voice softened with reverence.

There were actual tears in Alberta's eyes. Homely as was the setting, simple as was the scene, it had brought to her a revelation. After all, that was the real sum of life, was it not, dear God—love and a home and a clear, unbartered conscience?

"Well, if you still want to stay, I'm going out for a whisky and soda," Smart laughed unctuously, laying his heavy hand on hers as the curtain dropped on the second act. "You don't seem up to conversation tonight. I might as well have taken your aunt out—old lady's a corker when talk's scarce! If I'm not back by the time the curtain goes up don't get frightened. I'll be here before the bloom'n' thing's over."

As he was turning out in the aisle unconsciously even to herself Alberta's eyes swept him from head to foot—shambling physique, obtrusive jewels and all. She shuddered involuntarily, pressing his ring which she wore rather sharply into her flesh.

Oh, if only the orchestra would play that "Spring Song" of Mendelssohn's! she had been trying so hard to shut

Robert Harvey out from her life, and this fetched him so vividly before her! But, if I live with him, then we two On the low earth shall prosper, hand in hand—

Those were the words from Stephen Phillips' "Marpessa" which Harvey had been wont to set to that music, saying, "They seem to be made for each other—just like you and I, sweetheart."

How ever in the world had she made herself able to give him up? It was her cursed love of luxury, she told herself, and what would luxury profit her without him? What a fool she had been! But the worst was yet to do. Tomorrow she was to write the letter which was to stab his dear heart like a knife.

And an awfully stunning fellow, regular Gibson type, you know. We tried to induce him to join us tonight, but, you see, he lives in Louisville. Alberta turned her head ever so slightly. The people back of her who had been amused at Mr. Smart's inconsiderateness when he first came in were talking.

"And he leaves for the south tomorrow. Fancy arriving in fascinating old New York one day and leaving it the next! Ma says she'll warrant he has a sweetheart in Louisville, for he's dead set on going there immediately. This morning on deck just before we sailed into the harbor—" But "ma," who was from Chicago and full of western enterprise, finished the sentence for herself.

"I came on him unexpectedly, and what d'ye think he was doing? Leaning over the rail and looking at a picture in his watch. 'Ah-ha, Mr. Harvey!' I cried. 'You're caught at last! Will you let me see her picture?' 'In a few moments I'll show you the statue of Liberty instead,' said he, closing his watch softly and unstrapping his field glasses. And, would you believe it, the winking sweetness of his smile took all the sting out of his refusal."

"Why don't you strike for him, Maude, and cut the Louisville girl out?" came a laughing voice. "Or wasn't he looking for a rich wife?" "Don't know, I'm sure," was the response. "But anyhow he's not rich. Got the information from his chum coming over—the one who's going to take us to the Union League reception tomorrow. He owns some sort of a plantation in Kentucky, however, and people there call him le grand seigneur 'cause he's considered so exclusive. It appears Mr. Harvey in his aristocratic poverty had a horror of the nouveau riches." She sniffed daintily and giggled.

The lights went down, the orchestra stopped playing, and the curtain went up on the third act.

Presently, having had one glass of whisky and soda too much, Smart came back. He looked at Alberta closely with a look before which she suddenly shrank. She'd seen it focused ere this on many things—his automobile, his diamonds, his horses—but never wholly on herself. That glance of possession shot through her nerves with a sickening annihilation.

"You'll loosen the stone in your ring if you keep turning it round like that," said Smart in a blurred whisper. "An' that sort of diamond ain't stumbled against every day, let me tell you."

At the close of the third act, although there was still the fourth to be played, Alberta turned to her companion.

"We'll go now," she said simply. But "she" helped her on with her wrap he wondered at the strange, soft illumination of her face. It was an illumination he had never seen before, an illumination in which he knew instinctively he had no part.

When Smart, having got his hat and coat, joined her in the lobby, and was about to call for a cab, one of the girl's hands went out to his ready arm, but the other deftly handed him his ring.

"I've decided you'd better keep it," she said calmly, while, his fingers closing tightly about the jewel, Smart gazed with amazement at her strange smile. "I'll explain to you as we walk along. No; not a cab. I prefer to walk. It isn't far to auntie's. She would not suffer his proximity, however brief, in a carriage."

"Have you gone mad?" he demanded, putting the bauble securely in his wallet. "Of all idiotic nonsense! And, besides, you're not dressed for walking."

"Oh, what does a little thing like that matter?" cried she, with almost a child's fresh joy in her voice. "Nothing matters now but the big things." And, gathering up her skirts, she added, half to herself, with a queer little thrill: "I'm going home tomorrow! I'm going home to Louisville tomorrow!"

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Many a year ago a "plebe" at the Naval academy astonished an upper class man by going to him and announcing, "See here, I don't like the way my class is being treated." The upper class man was nearly surprised out of his wits, but, recovering from his stupor (and only one who knows the full meaning of "rate" among the midshipmen can have a correct appreciation of what that announcement from a "plebe" to an upper class man carried), the "rating" demanded, "Midshipman, do you want to fight?" "That's what I am looking for," the fight was arranged and the "plebe" whipped his man, says the New York Herald. Then another youngster was supplied, and he went the way of the first, and so on until a half-dozen had been disgraced. Sometimes several fights would follow in succession, when the "plebe" would say: "Gentlemen, I am tired now. I'll see you again another day." The academy authorities found out what was in progress and sent for the "plebe," and then, before official authority, he announced, "I can whip the whole class." It turned out that the "plebe" had been a prize fighter or before entering the academy.

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An ordinance to amend an ordinance entitled  
"An ordinance in relation to hawkers and ped-  
dlers, adopted March 19, 1906." Be it ordained  
by the Town Council of the Town of Bloomfield,  
that section 2 of the ordinance to which this  
ordinance is amendatory shall hereafter read  
as follows:  
"Section 2. Each and every person so licensed  
as a peddler who is not both a resident of the  
Town of Bloomfield and a taxpayer therein  
shall pay to the Town Clerk for each license  
the sum of ten (\$10) dollars for the use of the  
town, and no such license shall be granted by  
the Town Council of the Town of Bloomfield to  
any person or persons who shall not be both a  
resident of the Town of Bloomfield and a tax-  
payer therein unless the license fee provided  
by this ordinance shall have been deposited  
with the Clerk of the said Town of Bloomfield,  
and if the application is rejected said de-  
posit shall be returned to the applicant and the  
said Clerk shall keep a record of all such  
licenses in a book to be provided for that pur-  
pose, and each wagon, cart or vehicle shall  
have the name and address of the owner painted  
legibly on same, the letters of such sign to be  
no less than one inch in length.  
Adopted May 12, 1906.  
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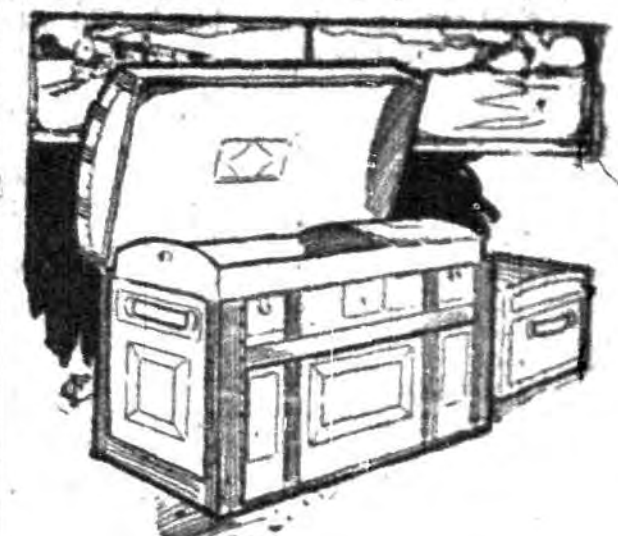
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